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'JFK' is not the way Valenti remembers LBJ

Oliver Stone's "JFK" distorts history and degrades Lyndon Johnson with vicious lies, says Motion Picture Assn. of America prexy Jack Valenti, a former aide to Johnson.

In a stinging, seven-page statement that Valenti said was unconnected to his role in the film industry, he tackled Stone's depiction of a Kennedy assassination conspiracy that included then-Vice President Johnson.

Valenti dismissed the alleged cover-up painted by the Oscar-nominated best film as "quackery" plucked from a "slag heap of loony theories" in a book by former New Orleans prosecutor Jim Garrison.

Garrison, played by Kevin Costner in "JFK," became obsessed with trying to prove that President Kennedy was killed by conspirators, not by Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone.

However, another perspective on the assassination emerged this week from Dr. Charles Crenshaw, who had been part of the Parkland Memorial Hospital trauma team that treated John F. Kennedy.

Crenshaw, breaking a 29-year-silence, told ABC's "20/20" that Kennedy was shot from the front, not from the rear, as maintained by the Warren Commission. His book, "JFK: Conspiracy of Silence," is to be published next week.

Valenti's statement asked, "Does any sane human being truly believe that President Johnson, the Warren Commission members, law enforcement officers, CIA, FBI, White House aides, and assorted thugs, weirdos, Frisbee throwers, all conspired together as plotters in Garrison's wacky sightings?

"And then for almost 29 years nothing leaked? But you have to believe it if you think well of any part of this accusatory lunacy," Valenti said. Garrison's book was dismissed by Valenti as "hallucinatory bleatings."

Stone said through a Warner Bros. spokesman yesterday that he respected Valenti's loyalty to Johnson but found "his emotional diatribe off the mark."

"The overwhelming majority of Americans ... agree with the central thesis of my film: that President Kennedy was killed by a conspiracy which included people in the government," Stone said in a New York Times story yesterday.

A call seeking comment from Garrison was not immediately returned yesterday, while Karl Malden, president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences,

Turn to page 30

'JFK' is not the way Valenti remembers LBJ

Continued from page 3

was away filming and was unavailable for comment, an assistant said.

Valenti, who became a special assistant to Johnson immediately following the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination in Dallas, cites an intimate knowledge of White House affairs in rebutting the film's portrayal of events.

He also defends the members of the Warren Commission, appointed to investigate the slaying: "To indict these men of honor, along with Lyndon Johnson, is vicious, cruel and false."

Other thoughts from Valenti's letter:

"... in his movie, Oliver Stone indicts President Lyndon Johnson (and the Warren Commission) as a conspirator in a vast cover-up of the assassination of President Kennedy. It is that accusation that prompts this statement.... I cannot and will not allow Mr. Stone to foul the memory of Lyndon Johnson.

"I don't know how history will regard LBJ a generation from now. Perhaps because of Vietnam, President Johnson will just have to settle for being the greatest American President ever for the under-educated young, the poor and the old, the sick and the black, all those pressed against the wall because of circumstances beyond their control, and about whom few cared. But Lyndon Johnson cared. He cared very much. That is why he put his political future to hazard to do something specific and lasting to remedy their plight....

"The question that this movie doesn't ask, much less answer, is how come Oliver Stone places such faith in Garrison, whose wild surmises leaked credibility from the start; whose proof is non-existent; whose loose-fibered charges never found allies among any group, even those who passionately support a "conspiracy theory"; whose indictments are as soiled as his destruction of an innocent man, Clay Shaw. It took the jury less than 30 minutes to acquit Shaw of all charges.

"My own rebuttal to Mr. Stone comes down to this: I was there, and he wasn't....

"As a newly minted Special Assistant to the President ... I rarely left the President's side during the long days and nights of his early presidency.... I was privy to the innermost thoughts of the President and I knew the views of JFK's aides, all of whom LBJ asked to stay on to counsel him....

"In scene after scene Mr. Stone plasters together the half true and totally false and from that he manufactures the plausible. No wonder than many young people, gripped by the movie, leave the theater convinced they have been witness to the Truth.

"In much the same way, young German boys and girls in 1941 were mesmerized by Leni Reifenstahl's "Triumph of the Will," in which Adolf Hitler was depicted as a new-born God. Both "JFK" and "Triumph of the Will" are equally a propaganda masterpiece, and equally a hoax. Mr. Stone and Leni Reifenstahl have another genetic linkage: Neither of them carried a disclaimer on their film that its contents were mostly pure fiction...."